

Thinking Hebraically

(להשוב בדרך של העברית)

You might have heard it said that we need to think hebraically or we need to have a Hebrew mind rather than a having Greek mind (Western mind). But what does it really mean to think hebraically and why is it important? In this short research paper we will look at some of the fundamental differences in the mindset of the Hebrew people of Biblical times as compared to today. We will examine the Hebrew mind based on the Hebrew Scriptures. How does the Hebrew mindset contrast to the Greek (Western) mindset that resulted in the bulk of Christian theology as we know it today?

According to the Torah, the first person to be called a “Hebrew” was Avraham in *Bereshit / Genesis 14:13* which says “*Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram.*” (NASB) All of the Scriptures (the Tanach and the Ketuvei Shelachim) were written by the Hebrew people (the Jewish people). The concept of “thinking Hebraically” therefore is the process of understanding the manner of speech, the way words are used, and the important life issues as understood by someone from the Hebrew culture. How did the people of the bible (specifically the Hebrew people) look at life, what is their world view, how do they understand truth, what are their values, how are their concepts understood, what do they know about God, what is their theology, and how do they understand man? These are the questions we need to be asking ourselves while reading the Scriptures. From the Hebraic perspective, truth was understood not as an idea but as an experience. The truth is defined by what has happened, what has taken place in history and not in the realm of “ideas” as it is today. Hebraic values ask the question “show me what you have done;” and not “tell me what you are going to do.” Hebraic concepts are found in the biblical text to be action oriented and not based on abstract thought. For example, a verb is a word used to describe an action state or occurrence forming the main part of the predicate of a sentence. In a typical Hebrew sentence, the verb comes first. Therefore, based on the Hebrew language (the Hebrew syntax) Hebraic concepts are written so as to emphasize actions. Hebraic concepts are written as actions, for example in sefer *Bereshit / Genesis 22:4* Moshe writes “to look” is to “lift up the eyes (*וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם*) (*מִרְחֹק*), in *Shemot / Exodus 4:14* Moshe writes “to be angry” is equal to the “nose is burning” (*וַיִּחַר-אַף יְהוָה בְּמֹשֶׁה*), in sefer *Rut / Ruth 4:4*, to “reveal” something is to “unstop the ears” (*אֲנִלְהָ אָזְנוֹךָ*), and in sefer *Aleph Shemual / 1 Samuel 6:6* says to “have no compassion” on someone is to “have a hard heart” (*תִּכְפְּדוּ אֶת-לִבְבְּכֶם כְּאִשֶּׁר כְּפְדוּ מֵעֲרִים וּפְרַעַה אֶת-לִבָּם*) drawing a parallel with the hardness of heart of Pharaoh. As you can see, these excerpts from the Hebrew Scriptures, the leading verb illustrates the action oriented nature of the Hebraic thought process. As a result of these types of conceptual descriptions being action based or action oriented, the Hebrew people understood God as “unseen” and described Him saying that God has eyes, ears, hands, and feet.

The theology of the Hebrew understanding of God is that He was not created rather; He is the creator of all life. In addition to this, theologically speaking, the Hebrew people did not understand what it means to have a “list of beliefs.” A “list of beliefs” was foreign to their understanding of the Scriptures. The people of the Bible thought along the lines of “relationship,” and not in the abstract realm of ideas like we do today. This process of thinking is oriented to what happens physically as illustrated in the Hebrew Scriptures where (i) the

thinking process occurs in the heart where a person loves (see *Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:5* וְאָהַבְתָּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ), (ii) the stomach area is where a person feels anguish like when we are nervous (see *Yeremiyah / Jeremiah 4:19* [אוֹחִילָהּ] מְעִי | מְעִי אֶחֱוִלָהּ), (iii) a person experience horror or terror in the liver (see *Kohelet / Lamentations 2:11* וּפְנֵי אֲנִי בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂי יְיָ), and (iv) a person rejoices in their kidneys (see *Mishley / Proverbs 23:16* וְתַעֲלֵז זִנְהָ כְלֵיוֹתַי בְּדַבַּר שִׁפְתֶיךָ מֵיִשְׁרָיִם). In point number (ii), when we are feeling nervous or scared, the body physically manifests the feeling in the stomach/intestinal region. I have personally experienced this haven't you? The action oriented description draws us into the scriptures on the reality of who we are. This is at least illustrated in the idea of “anguish” and “nervousness” and the action oriented thought process. In point number (i), the Hebrew thinking process occurs in the heart. This is different from our understanding on where we think in our head (the brain) what we know based on modern science today. Interestingly, missing in the Hebrew Scriptures is the idea that the head does the thinking. The question then is according to the Scriptures, how is the head viewed or understood? The head is understood as the place where a person's life resides, God endowed the head with the mechanism that sustains and manages the rest of the body. It is in this Hebrew concept that forms the basis for the Husband being the head of his wife and the Messiah being called the “head of the ecclesia” in Greek or “head of the church” in English (see *Ephesians 5:23*).

One of the most interesting concepts is that of the Hebraic understanding of “Man.” The Hebrew person was not concerned with theological arguments on the composition of the human person like the ruling of the Council of Nicea 325 CE, the first church council that convened to decide the nature of Yeshua (Jesus) and God the Father. Examining history, the result of having a philosophical mindset (Greek thinking) produced the Arianism heresy which state that Yeshua and the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) were created. The idea of the philosophical basis of reality, a move away from the concrete action oriented understanding of the world (Hebraic understanding), was the result of Greek thinking most prominently from the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle proposed that reality consisted of a conflict with what is seen and what is not seen. The Hebraic perspective, on the other hand, understood man to consist of the immaterial part (soul and spirit) with the material part (the body). Both the immaterial and material aspects of a man are of equal importance where one is not devalued in favor of others. Like today, the spiritual man is valued higher than that of our physical bodies, what we do in our bodies.

Based on our understanding from the Hebrew Scriptures we can conclusively surmise that Hebraic thought is a “**Both-And**” thought process whereas, in comparison, Greek thought is an “**Either-Or**” thought process. The differences between the “Both-And” and the “Either-Or” modes of thought are significant, profound, and very important. The Greek mode of thought is an attempt to avoid tension or disagreement in dialog. Think of this like a balance scale, one moves from one end to the other to balance out a discussion. In contrast, the Hebrew mode of thought recognizes the absolute need for “tension” in order to hold things together. This can be thought of as two weights on a string, Hebraic truth exists in the realm of tension. In the Greek thought process, Greek truth exists at various points along a straight line in progression, one truth leads to the next truth called “step logic.” The Hebraic thought process holds truth together in a clay pot; one clay pot may not necessarily lead to the next, thus “step logic” is not utilized. One truth does not necessarily lead to the next truth. It is in this way that the Hebrews understood truth; one clay pot contained the way man thinks about the world whereas another clay pot

contains God's perspective on the world. To better understand this let's look at a few examples on the Hebraic thought process that appear to be a contradiction based on the Greek thought process as compared to the Hebrew thought process. Below I give examples of only the Hebraic thought process; since we all have a little Greek thinking built in as a result of our culture it will be apparent that without the Hebraic mindset these concepts pose some difficulties (based upon Greek thinking).

Example Hebraic Thought Processes

The Messiah is the Lamb of God ← → The Messiah is the Lion of Judah
(*John 1:29-34* ← → *Hitgalut / Revelation 5:5, Bereshit / Genesis 49:8-10*)

Pharaoh hardened his own heart ← → God hardened Pharaoh's heart
(*Shemot / Exodus 7:13, 23, 8:15, 32* ← → *Shemot / Exodus 9:7, 10:1, 20*)

God is a God of Judgment (Wrathful) ← → God is merciful
(*Romans 2:2* ← → *Shemot / Exodus 34:6, Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:31*)

Whoever comes I will receive ← → Only those I draw come
(*John 6:35* ← → *John 12:20-36*)

Hell is black darkness ← → Hell is a fiery lake
(*Yehuda / Jude 1:13, Hitgalut / Revelation 19:20*)

When you are weak ← → Then you are strong
(*2 Corinthians 12:9-10*)

Life ← → death (Life comes through death)
(*Shemot / Exodus 12*)

The one who serves is the greatest of all
(*Matthew 23:11*)

The way up (exaltation) ← → is the way down (humility)
(*Matthew 23:11*)

God controls all things ← → prayer changes things
(*Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:11-12* ← → *2 Kings 20:1-6*)

God controls all things ← → Man is responsible for his deeds
(*Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:11-12* ← → *Ezekiel 3:18-19, Romans 14:12*)

God cannot dwell with sinners ← → God became a man
(*Habakkuk 1:13* ← → *John 1:1-14, Word become flesh*)

God is sovereign ← → there is wrong in the world
(*Devarim / Deuteronomy 3, Tehilim / Psalms 115:3, Isaiah 46:10*)

As you can see, the Hebraic way of thinking based on the Hebrew Scriptures show a tension in the mode of thought, the logic in understanding the world around us. On the other hand, Greek thought causes difficulties for understanding the Bible and God along with His actions. In the Hebrew Scriptures, everything relates to God, religion was a way of life; time and history are in God's hands. Greek thinking has caused significant difficulties understanding scripture. The Greeks divided everything to be either secular or sacred, whereas the Hebrews understood the material world to be either holy or unholy. This is because the Hebrew way of life revolved around worshipping God. Everything was based upon the physical reality of being unclean and becoming clean in order to draw near to the Lord in the Temple service. It is also understood that God brought both the good and the bad times (see *Job 2:9-10 and Matthew 5:45*). Studying *Job 2:9-10*, following what Satan had done to Job's family, his wife questioned why he holds onto his integrity in the midst of all that has happened. Job's response shows us that the Hebrew person was to be prepared to pray with a blessing on everything no matter the circumstance. We find a parallel thought process in the Ketuvei Shelachim as it says in *1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing; 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (NASB)* Today, Greek thinking has caused us to question God on why difficult times have come not having the perspective that difficult times brings growth, physically, mentally, emotionally, and most importantly spiritually. In fact, Greek thinking has led some to question the Scriptures believing that God is merciful now but was only wrathful and judgmental in the Tanach (OT).

The Hebraic way of thinking shows that life is to be holy for the Lord and that man is of great value to God and to each other. God has provided all things to enjoy and we are to rejoice before Him. We can see this in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:5-10* in bringing the first produce of the ground to the Lord in worship.

דברים 26:5-10

5 אֱלֹהֶיךָ: וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲרָמִי אֲבִי
אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּגֶר שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מֵעַט וַיְהִי-שָׁם לְנֹוֹי
6 נָדוּל עָצוּם וָרֹב: וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ
7 עָלֵינוּ עֲבָרָה קָשָׁה: וַנַּעֲשֶׂק אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ
וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-קִלְנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת-עֲנִינוּ וְאֶת-עַמְלָנוּ וְאֶת-
8 לְחַצְנוּ: וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֹרַע נְמוּנָה
9 וּבְמַרְא נִדְל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתֹּיִם: וַיְבֵאֵנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם
תְּנוּה וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ:
10 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵבֵאתִי אֶת-רֵאשִׁית פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-
נָתַתָּה לִּי יְהוָה וְהִנְחֵתוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ
11 לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: וְשִׂמַחְתָּ בְּכָל-הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ

Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:5 'You shall answer and say before the Lord your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but

there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 26:6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 26:7 'Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 26:8 and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 26:9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 26:10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O Lord have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God; (NASB)

As you can see based on this one scripture, the religious system, the Hebrew way of life was not a list of ethics and codes or lofty ideas. The religious way of life was an earthly journey where we lived and interacted with God on a daily basis. The Scriptures say *“Thy word is a light to ones path”* (Tehilim / Psalms 119:105), *“in all they ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path”* (Mishley / Proverbs 3:6), *“broad is the path to destruction and narrow is the way to life”* (Matthew 7:13), and how the apostle James says in James 2:21 that *“we are justified by our works.”* This is how Yeshua understood our “walk” before God and taught Halachah (the way) we should be walking before God. Reading the Hebrew translation of the Ketuvei Shelachim, the people were amazed, astonished by Yeshua (Jesus) Torah. The English translation says that they were amazed, astonished at his teaching. The Hebrew language indicates that they were amazed at Yeshua’s teaching, his instruction. This gives us a completely different understanding on the word “Torah.” Does this refer to Yeshua’s “Law” as is the typical interpretation for Torah today?

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מרקוס 1:22

וַיְלַמֵּד שְׁמָהּ: וַיְתַמְּדוּ עָלָיו תּוֹרָתוֹ כִּי יָדַע לְלַמְּדָם כַּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
שְׁלֹטוֹן בְּיָדוֹ וְלֹא כַּסּוֹפְרִים: וְשֵׁם נִמְצָא אִישׁ בְּבֵית־הַכְּנֶסֶת

לוקס 4:32

וַיְתַמְּדוּ עָלָיו תּוֹרָתוֹ כִּי כָדָר שְׁלֹטוֹן הָיָה דְבָרוֹ: וְאִישׁ הָיָה
בְּבֵית־הַכְּנֶסֶת וְכֹן דָּבַק רוּחַ טָמֵא וְנִתְעַב וַיִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל:

מתתיהו 22:33

וַיְהִיָּה אֵינֶנּוּ אֱלֹהֵי הַמֵּתִים כִּי אִם־אֱלֹהֵי הַחַיִּים: וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ הַמּוֹן
הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה־נִּפְלְאָה תּוֹרָתוֹ: וְהַפְּרוּשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ כִּי סָכַר פִּי

Yeshua taught the way we should be walking before God is to pay close attention to the condition of our hearts as we interact with other members of the covenant community and on the relationship with God especially while worshiping God (see *Matthew 5:23-24*). We understand this because the Hebrew person (David) spoke of *“the way of the wicked”* and *“the paths of righteousness”* in *Tehilim / Psalms 1*. This is also why Yeshua did not ask people “what they believed” very often rather, he asked “what they did” and gave parables based on what one has done based on an action oriented Hebraic mindset. This is why it is also written that true religion is not what one thinks but what one does (see *Matthew 25:31-40* and *Yehuda / James 1:27*). Faith and actions work together.

If we are to understand the world based on the Bible, and if we seek to live, love, understand, and worship God according to the Bible, we need to adopt a Hebraic mindset. Reading through the Bible, we quickly realize that God is dealing with man through history and He is dealing with us today, right this moment at this very point in “history.” If you are truly His, if you are truly a child of God, and truly a covenant member in Yeshua, the Lord is actively working in your life. Unless we go through trials and tribulations, we do not know how we will act, behave, and believe as we live out our faith. If we do not know where we come from, we will not know where we are going. In the Tanach and the Ketuvei Shelachim, God interacts with man through various covenant systems, leading to the concept of the covenant relationship with God. The covenant relationship is the heart of the Hebraic understanding according to the Bible. Only when one becomes a true covenant member does one truly become a member of the community of believers. Thus, to be cut off from the community of believers is synonymous with being cut off from God. The very idea of “church hopping” or “finding another church” is based on this Greek mindset where truth is based on an idea (in the realm of philosophy) and not based on a Hebraic mindset in the covenant relationship with God (through His Son Yeshua) the concrete action oriented and Biblical way of understanding the truth of God’s Word. If we maintain a Greek mindset that is based on ideas and concepts founded on philosophical principles we will continue to have conflicts in our minds for understanding scripture. Without an action oriented understanding of whom God is and what God has done for us, the development of various erroneous theologies and doctrines will continue to be produced that is not based on the truth of scripture. So, do you think it is important for to begin thinking more like the Hebrew people and stop thinking like Greeks? Your understanding of scripture is at stake and most importantly your relationship with God may be significantly affected! Could your salvation in Yeshua (Jesus) also be affected? You decide!

Have a blessed day in Yeshua the Messiah!

What to pray:

- *Ask the Lord to help you to begin the process of understanding His Word from a Hebraic perspective.*
- *Ask the Lord to help you live your life by faith in the way the Word of God describes in the Bible.*
- *Thank the Lord for lifting the burden of sin, revealing His truth, and enabling us in this day and age of unbelief to live for Him.*

Be Blessed in Yeshua, Christ our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:
 Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
 “Yeshua” King Messiah forever and ever